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A CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY

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A CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY

WANTON BLOODSHED IN INDIA

Thanks to Mahatma Gandhi, Ahimsa is receiving greater consideration to-day ; but even now, few have bestowed any attention on some of its phases. For spiritual development, the value of or the need for Ahimsa is well recognised ; but there are other aspects no less important, and at the present moment, for India, as also to the rest of the world, the economic need for Ahimsa requires to be urgently noted.

Himsa, cruelty or bloodshed, is indulged in for various reasons. There are those who injure or kill animal and bird life for their food or sustenance. There are others who do it for its very joy ! To a sensible person, it may seem monstrous that one should derive any pleasure from wanton or useless bloodshed ; but there are many such and some of them are placed in high positions. Take for instance, our big officials going for " sport ". Sometimes, the party is responsible for the slaughter of thousands of birds and animals. Not all are eaten by them or their retinue ; and hundreds are left to rot where they die and a good number of the victims linger for hours and days in agony before kind fate ends their suffering for ever.

What pleasure they get through such destruction, it is hard to guess ! And where is " sportsmanship " when innocent lives are helplessly shot down ? Whatever it is, that the " sportsmen " are at the same time indulging in a greater crime—prejudicing the prospects of our cultivating classes is not widely recognised. And this question is of considerable consequence.

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A Practical Lesson

The problem will be quite clear in the light of this one experiment. In America the agricultural department ordered that on two stretches of land, each about five miles square, the value of bird life should be investigated. On one, every bird was destroyed. They were not even allowed to approach it. The other plot, which lay at a consiserable distance from the first, was developed, more or less, as a sanctuary for birds. They were encouraged to come and stay there, permanently if they so desired. In the course of three years, it was found that no vegetation was visible on the first plot, in spite of copious water supply ; whereas, the other, similarly watered, was found to yield luxurious vegetation. Whatever plants were present at the start of the experiment on the first plot had been eaten up by insects or pests. But no pests were destroying the plants on the bird infested area.

What happened is this. In the first plot, insects and pests easily multiplied and in the second, they were kept in check by the birds. Thereby the balance of Nature was kept up in the natural manner and the result was so encouraging.

Even the Reptiles

And it is not birds alone that are so important and useful. Even animals and reptiles have their use. Quite recently, the State of New Jersey, in America, had, after a thorough examination of the problem, decided that even its reptiles should not be exported. This may seem fanatical ; in reality it is not. The disappearance of certain species of reptiles, which are killed for their skin or trapped for museums, has been found to be disastrous to cultivators.

Here is an instance from our own country.

The Divi Islands, off the West Coast, are inhabited by Moplahs, who, perhaps to spite the Hindus, indulge in a crusade against the cobra ; and this pastime is extended often

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to all types of reptiles. They carried this cruelty too far, with the result that rats, which were so far kept in check by reptiles, began to multiply rapidly and finding no food on the surface of the earth, they began to invade cocoanut trees, which are of small stature on those islands, and in a short time, so disastrous did the depredations prove that the resi, dent cultivators could get no crop whatever in some areas. Happily they had an intelligent administrative officer who suggested that they should import reptiles. A small shipload of these was taken from the mainland. Most of them died on the way; but the few that reached the island soon restored its prosperity.

The Kaka Thotam

There are many cultivators in India who know this secret and make the best use of it. They strictly prohibit the slaughter of bird or animal life. "Sportsmen" are kept at a distance. Very often, they do not send persons up the trees to pluck off fruits, lest the birds should fear the safety of their nests and migrate. Specially in cocoanut plantations, they are patient enough to allow the fruit to fall down. The yield in all such cases is enormous. The writer has not seen it, but has had it verified from several observers that in the Godavari delta, near the coast, there is a big cocoanut plantation, popularly called the Kaka Thotam, the garden of crows. The owner influences them to build their nests there by every means in his power. No one is allowed to disturb the birds or to go up these trees and the result is said to be amazing. No cocoanut garden in the delta yields such a harvest. The yield of manure from bird excretions constitutes also a great gain, though it may seem infinitesimal at first.

Are Monkeys Harmful?

Nor is this usefulness confined to birds and reptiles alone. From South Africa comes this experience of considerable interest:

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Finding the baboons most pestilential and destructive, they got the legislature to remove the ban on their destruction and the animals were shot dead indiscriminately. For the moment, a considerable crop of fruits was saved from their depredations; but the next year, the farmers paid a very severe penalty. Every fruit, apples in particular, was found to be attacked by insects which rendered them absolutely valueless for the market, specially for export, and the growers became desperate. It was, however, soon found that they owed this disaster to the disappearance of baboons. They certainly ate a few fruits here and there; but their main food was found to be the insects which had multiplied in the absence of the baboons and had destroyed the fruit crops. So the farmers found it necessary to invite and even worship the monkey, whom they, in their ignorant arrogance, had scared away or shot down.

Some of our blood-thirsty "sportsmen" take a delight in shooting down bats. But how useful they are! The wise city fathers of Vienna have banished the mosquito pest by their aid. Not only is it criminal to kill bats in that city but special platforms have been built for their use. The bats are most fond of mosquitoes and any city can get rid of that pest by encouraging bats to colonise in its area.

The Useful Sparrow

And our household sparrows are equally useful. The writer is specially grateful to them for rendering his office habitable. A few months ago, so full was it of mosquitoes that even the watchman of the office could not be induced to stay there at night. The mosquito curtain was useless. For, through some crevice or other they would rush in and render sleep impossible. Even during day time, they constituted a veritable plague.

Then it pleased Providence to invite the attention of a brood of sparrows to this region. After their arrival, a few

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window doors were kept open for their free movement even during night. The result was wonderful. The mosquitoes have disappeared. Even the few that come from other areas and hide in nooks and corners of day break are hunted out.

There is a belief in some parts of India that if sparrows can be influenced to build their nests in a house, it is soon filled with children. Whether that be so or not, one result is clear. The mosquito pest, malaria in its wake, and costly doctor's bills are kept away.

The writer has observed these sparrows in another very useful piece of work: On the West Coast, in the few weeks following the outbreak of the monsoon, luxuriant vegetation will grow up and along with it green insects, about an inch and a half long. They are such rapid consumers of vegetation that in some gardens small bushes will disappear over night. In the morning only the stems will be seen and the circle of devastation will go on widening. At this juncture, some sparrow will discover the spot and invite its community, which will cleanse the area as quickly as the pest had made itself felt. In the small beak of some sparrows, there will at times be five to six of these insects, which will be transported to their nests in regular succession. The whole area will be closely searched for even the hiding insects and the vegetation will soon be normal again.

The sparrow is one of the most useful birds in this respect. Happily they are not destroyed for "sport" or food; but at the same time, they are not receiving as good facilities for their propagation as they deserve. Stupid people consider them a nuisance and suffer for it in several ways.

To Fight Malaria

Various parts of India are now suffering badly from Malaria. Special staff have been employed in some; but to no purpose. Hardly any attention has however been paid to this aspect of combating the growth of mosquitoes—beyond

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showing that certain types of fish live on mosquito larvæ. They may be useful in large sheets of water; but in others, specially cities, those fish cannot be utilised. That being so, why should we not learn from Vienna and see whether bats cannot help us? Sparrows can also be tried; but it looks as if bats are the better of the two. All that is necessary is to build some lofts suited to their use and stop their slaughter for "sport" or food. The cost will be negligible, far less perhaps than the salary and the travelling allowance of these special officers; and once their use is demonstrated, the people can be relied on to extend the facilities for the multiplication of those birds. To the extent to which the writer had facilities for inquiry, it is the experience of many people, specially in villages, that malaria got a better hold of their locality after some "civilised" person took to the destruction of bats and other birds.

The Pest Menace

Let us now examine the pest menace in India, and see where they are most destructive. In this province, Coimbatore and the adjacent areas are most liable. The explanation is obvious. The Western Ghats had for ages been the home of varieties of birds and animals and the civilised folks who stay permanently or for a short period in the Nilgiris have destroyed no small portion of them. Most of these enlightened people, when they find nothing handy, and get surfeited by the constant rounds of liquor and gambling, organise what are called shooting parties. Natural life is thereby reduced and scared away, and the poor ryots, the semi-civilised natives, suffer. If our courts yield real justice, it ought not to be difficult to secure for them ample damages for the destruction of their crops through pests from the all-wise "sportsman."

At the present moment, pests are most persistent in U. P. and Punjab, in those areas that are within a striking

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distance of Simla or other hill stations. So vast has been and is still the destruction of natural life near those abodes of enlightened humanity that the balance of Nature has been destroyed; and the result is the invasion of pests. Locusts come in vast armies and lay waste fertile areas carrying destitution to thousands of poor homes. At the same time, almost every day, parties of "benevolent" ladies and gentlemen, go out to destroy Natural life and if any human being should come in their way, God save him!

Is it fair or right, from any viewpoint, that this crime against humanity should go on? If the State has the interests of our agriculturists at heart, it must at once put an end to these "sporting" parties, refuse to license guns for the slaughter of natural life and make such slaughter a penal offence. But instead of doing that, those in high places set a most disastrous example to all perverted folk and thus encourage the disturbance of Nature and blast the agricultural prospects of India.

Sometimes they go even further and inflict additional injuries. The farmers are advised by experts to save themselves by spraying costly chemical preparations over their crops Granting that they are not interested in such trade or that they do not draw secret commission by such sale, is it not their duty to look round, study all the available literature, and take proper preventive action? Needless to say, most of those chemicals are ineffective.

And if the experts are so bad, the politicians are worse; Some of them personally partake in those disastrous "sports," while few have bestowed any attention on this question of pests. They will be surprised to hear that the real pests are the blood spilling "sportsmen."

Select and Kill?

A question will probably be asked at this stage whether all lower life should be left undisturbed or whether those

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may be killed which are decreed to be not useful. The only safe plan is to follow a policy of complete non-interference. Who can say which animals are of use and which are not? In South Africa, none of even the experts knew that baboons were more helpful to the ryots than harmful. That being the case, what is the guarantee that the expert advice will be reliable? Moreover, the destruction of the species declared to be harmful, as the Moplahs of Divi found, may lead to the multiplication of some other species even more harmful.

This issue takes, however, a different turn if one proceeds to the treatment of wild animals such as tigers. But at the worst, it is a narrow issue, arising only in the case of very few people. Even in their case, it is noteworthy that no animal is generally harmful if we do not generate fear or anger. Our Rishis and Yogis are not afraid of them; and in South India itself, when Sri Ramanashram was on the hill, the inmates were constant companions of reptiles including cobras; and the Maharshi was once gazed at by a tiger sitting closely for a number of hours and was left to himself thereafter. If we are non-violent and peaceful, rarely are we in danger from this source; even assuming that wild animals do not respond to our temperament, there is hardly any excuse for the destruction of innocent and harmless life that is now going on.

Quite recently a Himalyan tract had a very instructive experience in this respect.

Tigers were exterminated from the region on the ground that they killed the cattle now and then. Thereafter the agriculturists actually found themselves in a worse predicament. When the tiger left the scene, the panther made its appearance. And panthers are so cunning that the farmers could not get rid of them. Thy had been kept away by the tiger, and the official report has it that the panthers did far more havoc than the tigers! Such are the tricks which nature plays at the expense of our wise folk!

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Create Sanctuaries

India has many humanitarian leagues ; and all these must take up this question and bring home to the public and the government what an amount of harm has already been done by these " sports" and how urgent it is, now at least, to adopt a sane policy. And the responsibility lies most gravely on those in authority who, whatever the State policy, should on no account set the bad example that they are now doing.

Indian States are in a very good position in this respect, specially those ruled by Hindu Princes. They must prohibit all such slaughter and make no exception in the case of even big visitors. If the Rulers will do that, considerable relief can be obtained. For, those States will act as sanctuaries until the British administrations wake up to the enormity of the present situation and fall in line. Moreover, some Indian States possess valuable strips of forest property which can be easily developed into special refuges for natural life.

Such sanctuaries are quite common in the West, notably America, where they are so situated that swarms of birds can easily migrate from one to the other without incurring any great danger from "sportsmen." India needs a good number of such reserves. They cost very little and there is abundant room for them in our reserved forests. All that has to be done is to prohibit strictly slaughter of natural life in those specified areas and follow it up by refusing licence for fire arms intended for slaughter. The need for such sanctuaries is all the more urgent in areas which are at present being frequently harrassed by pests.

It may yield very valuable results if the progress of some of these pests, as for instance that of locusts in the North, is closely watched. At some stage in their journey, they vanish. How? Is it not the case that the insects are eaten up by birds that come in large numbers? And are these not the very birds which are badly slaughtered in thousands when our big folk

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go for "hunt" or "sport"? The inquiry must not be a show, just intended to prepetuate the present disastrous "pastimes." At the same time, it will be useful to popularise the literature that has been collected on this subject in foreign lands, specially America.

Some of the experts have however recognised the need to restore the balance of Nature in an indirect or partial manner.

They are now concentrating attention on the possibility of combating pests through other pests. *i.e.* They breed new species which are known to be hostile to those from which they are anxious to free any piece of land. This one type of bug is created to eat up another. For orchards invaded by "mealy bugs" are restored to prosperity by leteing loose "lady bugs" prepared in the laboratory. These "lady bugs" are a species of beetles which feed on mealy bugs.

Curiously enough, the experts stop thinking as that stage. They do not ask themselves whether a pest that is brought under control by creating or increasing the number of its enemies, was not brought into being by the destruction of those enemies or of other life which discharged the same function. Perhaps they are afraid that if the inquiry is pursued in that direction, they would be incurring the displeasure of the powers that be, the "sportsmen" higher up.

Value of Ahimsa

Though this argument may not appeal to most readers, it is necessary to place on record that Ahimsa is essential for one's spiritual development. Not only does it protect us from the attentions of wild animals, but it expands our own soul. The reverse of this proposition is also true. We injure ourselves when we injure others. Spiritually speaking, all creation is one, the parts of the one Supreme Being. That being so, it requires no explanation to convince any one that by injuring others we injure ourselves.

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One may go even further and affirm that himsa or cruelty deadens our finer feelings. That is why criminals on one side and soldiers or even police on the other, are so indifferent to bloodshed. The range of the proposition may be extended to those who indulge in "bloody" sports. Many have been wondering that persons in authority should not have been moved by the sufferings of the Satyagrahis when lathis rained on them shedding blood or maiming limbs. These critics overlook the experience which those officials had when they indulged in "sport"—shedding the blood of thousands of innocent lives for no purpose whatever!

A further inference is possible from this argument. As persons who indulge in such "sport" grow callous towards the sufferings of others, either they must not be allowed to grow callous or if they insist on such "sport" they should in fairness quit responsible positions. For, such "sportsmen" cannot be expected to sympathise with suffering humanity to the extent the people have a right to expect. Let not this claim be misunderstood. It is not racial. It is immaterial whether the blood-shedders are Indian or European. All human beings are rendered unfit for responsible positions by such indulgences. Whatever their public utterances, their sympathies are deadened, if not entirely killed.

GANDHIJI'S VIEW

Mahatma Gandhi has written :

" I believe that man, not having been given the power of creation, does not possess the right of destroying the meanest creature that lives. The prerogative of destruction belongs solely to the Creator.

" I accept the interpretation of Ahimsa that it is not merely a negative state of harmlessness but a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil doer. But it does not mean helping the evil doer to continue the wrong or tolerating it by passive acquiescence. On the contrary, love, the active state of Ahimsa, requires you to resist the wrong doer by disassociating yourself from him even though it may offend him or injure him physically."

So it is our duty to stop the wanton shedding of innocent blood in every way, even to the extent of actively non-co-operating with the killer.

This view is fully explained in the second vow which every member of the Satyagraha Ashram has to take.

" It is not enough not to take the life of any living being. The follower of this vow may not hurt even those whom he believes to be unjust. He may not be angry with them. He must love them. Thus he would meet the tyranny whether of parents, Governments or others, but he will never hurt the tyrant. The follower of Truth and Ahimsa will conquer the tyrant by love, he will not carry out the tyrant's will, but he will suffer imprisonment even unto death for disobeying his will until the tyrant himself is conquered."

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LESSON OF THE GITA

Though not directly bearing on the main theme of this pamphlet, the following passages from Gandhiji's note on the Gita, are of considerable interest :

I have felt that in trying to enforce in one's life the central teaching of the Gita, one is bound to follow truth and *Ahimsa*. When there is no desire for fruit, there is no temptation for untruth or *Himsa*. Take any instance of untruth or violence ; and it will be found that at its back was the desire to attain the cherished end. But it may be freely admitted that the Gita was not written to establish *Ahimsa*. It was an accepted and primary duty even before the Gita age. The Gita had to deliver the message of renunciation of fruit. This is clearly brought out as early as the 2nd chapter.

But if the Gita believed in *Ahimsa* or it was included in desirelessness, why did the author take a warlike illustration ? When the Gita was written, although people believed in *Ahimsa*, wars were not only not taboo, but nobody observed the contradiction between them and *Ahimsa*.

In assessing the implications of renunciation of fruit, we are not required to probe the mind of the author of the Gita as to his limitations of *Ahimsa* and the life. Because a poet puts a particular truth before the world, it does not necessarily follow that he has known or worked out all its great consequences, or that having done so, he is able always to express them fully. In this perhaps lies the greatness of the poem and the poet. A poet's meaning is limitless. Like man, the meaning of great writings suffers evolution. On examining the history of languages, we notice that the meaning of important words has changed or expanded. This is true of the Gita.

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Its author has himself extended the meanings of some of the current words. We are able to discover this even on a superficial examination. It is possible, that in the age prior to that of the Gita, offering of animals in sacrifice was permissible. But there is not a trace of it in the sacrifice in the Gita sense. In the Gita continuous concentration on God is the king of sacrifices. The third chapter seems to show that sacrifice chiefly means body labour for service. The third and the fourth chapters read together will give us other meanings for sacrifice, but never animal sacrifice. Similarly has the meaning of the word *sannyasa* undergone, in the Gita, a transformation. The *sannyasa* of the Gita will not tolerate complete cessation of all activity. The *sannyasa* of the Gita is all work and yet no work. Thus the author of the Gita by extending meanings of words has taught us to imitate him. Let it be granted, that according to the letter of the Gita, it is possible to say that warfare is consistent with renunciation of fruit. But after 40 years' unremitting endeavour fully to enforce the teaching of the Gita in my own life, I have, in all humility, felt that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of *Ahimsa* in every shape and form.